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Vietnam

Sen. Fulbright Criticizes an Editorial

It seems to me that the editorial in the Feb. 4 Washington Post entitled "Vietnam: The President and the Public" is unnecessarily critical of the Committee on Foreign Relations, in general, and of the authors of the committee staff report on Vietnam, in particular.

It is true that the authors of the report were physically present in Vietnam for only 11 days, as your editorial notes. It should be pointed out, however, that one of the authors, James Lowenstein, has visited Vietnam before, has spent more than two years in Asia while in the Foreign Service and has visited Southeast Asia frequently in the course of the four and a half years he has served on the committee staff. The other author, Richard Moose, has intimate knowledge of the background of our policies in Vietnam over the past several years as a result of his service in the White House on the National Security Council under both Dr. Rostow and Dr. Kissinger. Both have a wide acquaintanceship among American officials and journalists in Vietnam and among Vietnamese as well.

While on the subject of the length of visits to Vietnam, has The Post forgotten the numerous visits of briefer duration over the past two decades by various Vice Presidents, Secretaries of Defense and State, Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and special presidential emissaries? The optimistic reports emanating from these visits have been received with acclaim and used to justify important policy decisions. The Post has not criticized these visitors for reaching certain conclusions on the basis of brief visits but, on the contrary, has often praised them, even though subsequent events proved their predictions to be wrong. The Post has not seen a connection between the length of visits to Vietnam and the validity of the conclusions reached by visitors in the past. Why does The Post now suddenly imply that such a connection exists? Perhaps the editorial means to say that readers should dismiss the reports of The Post correspondents who file their reports after visits of only a few days.

The editorial criticized the committee staff report for not reaching a "judgment" as to whether the President's Vietnam policy should be reviewed. I do not see how a reader could possibly draw any other conclusion, even though the label "judgment" was not used. In the same vein, you state that the "authors have misgivings but they do not have an alternative." Again, it seems to me that the alternative is perfectly ob-

vious—that is, a negotiated settlement rather than a continuation of the war, as the policy of Vietnamization seems unfortunately to imply.

Finally, you say that the committee is prepared to leave the responsibility for "mustering public support" for a policy to the President alone. This statement ignores the efforts the committee has made for the past several years in trying to muster public support for a policy designed to shorten the war and also overlooks the fact that The Post was extremely critical of the committee's efforts to do so during the Johnson administration. I regret that the committee has not been more successful in bringing the war to an end. But what success we have had in mobilizing public opinion on this issue has contributed, in no small measure I believe, to bringing Mr. Nixon to the White House and to changing the policy of the United States in Vietnam from escalation to de-escalation.

I would like to make one more point about the committee staff report. The editorial staff of The Washington Post may not be aware of the fact that under the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946 the committee staff is supposed to be appointed on a non-partisan basis. The committee has succeeded in living up to the letter as well as the spirit of that law. Committee staff consultants are appointed on the basis of their professional experience and competence with, it should be emphasized, the agreement of both Democratic and Republican senior members of the committee.

This selection procedure has, I believe, provided the committee with a staff able to appraise situations with objectivity as well as expertise. Because they report to the committee as a whole, and thus cannot hope to please all committee members, the reports of the staff are not based on the need to justify previous policies or on the temptation to conform to institutional prejudices, unlike the situation in the executive branch. The standards by which their reports are judged are far more severe—that is, whether they describe the present objectively and predict the future accurately. I believe that The Post agrees that the staff report on Vietnam meets the first test. Whether it meets the second, only time will tell. But I am confident that the report will stand the test of time at least as well as past editorials of The Washington Post.

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